



## Policy and Guidelines for Suspending or Discontinuing Degree/Major Programs

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(Policy history: Original policy memo issued November 7, 1995. Revised policy guidelines adopted by UAPC, May 17, 2012. Administrative revision, June 22, 2018.)

Note that these general principles also apply to named options associated with degree/major programs.

### Definitions

Suspending admissions – no admissions are allowed for a period of up to three years.

Such a suspension allows time for program faculty to make a determination of whether the degree/major program will be re-opened or permanently discontinued. A report and proposal is due (to the provost) at the end of a specified time period (three years or less) to re-open or to discontinue the program.

Discontinuation – a request to permanently close a program and discontinue degree/major activities.

### Typical Reasons for Suspending/Discontinuing a Degree/Major Program

Proposals to suspend admissions to or discontinue degree/major programs arise from a number of circumstances. The circumstances that most often occasion such a request are:

- The degree/major is a low-award program that no longer serves needs of students, faculty, and the mission of the university. According to UW-Madison program review guidelines, degree/majors that award fewer than five (5) degrees in a five-year period are deemed “low award” and are to be reviewed and considered for discontinuation.
- The degree/major is part of a restructuring plan that will result in a merger or re-organization of existing programs. Such proposals originate with faculty when they judge that program goals are more effectively achieved through renewal and restructuring that may require that one or more programs be formally discontinued.
- The degree/major has student enrollment and student interest, but a range of circumstances – often budgetary or resource allocation issues – compel the program faculty and school/college dean to seek suspension of admissions or program discontinuation.

- The degree/major is a non-admitting master's program that is a partner program to a PhD program of the same name that is an admitting program. In such cases, notice must be given but all other limits described in these guidelines do not apply.

### Planning Considerations and Process

In all cases, suspending admissions or discontinuing an academic program requires the same open and transparent process, widespread communication, documentation of concurrence by other interested and affected units, and participation in shared governance as is required to gain approval for a new program. Planning and proposal development will involve consultation and communication with a wide range of academic, administrative, and student support units. During their lifespan, academic programs become integrated with other academic programs and student services. The suspension of a degree/major must be managed so as to minimize any potentially adverse impact on students, on applicants admitted to the program, and on faculty and staff. Appropriate and timely notice must be given to all interested groups. Throughout the planning process faculty and staff should consult with their dean's office, the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research, the Registrar's Office, the Graduate School, the Office of Undergraduate Advising, student governance groups, and others.

Proposals to suspend admissions to, discontinue, or restructure academic programs are:

1. The academic unit (department) that owns the degree/major reviews and approves the proposal.
2. The school/college (usually at the academic planning council or equivalent governance body) reviews and approves the proposal. Following approval by the school/college academic planning council, the proposal is forwarded to the provost.
3. For undergraduate degree/majors, the University Academic Planning Council will review the proposal for approval. For graduate programs, the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) Council will review the proposal for approval. GFEC actions are reported to the UAPC as automatic consent items.
4. The Provost's Office reports approved proposals to relevant UW-Madison offices (Office of Admissions and Recruiting, Office of the Registrar, University Communications, Catalogs, Office of Undergraduate Advising, Graduate School, Madison Budget Office, and so on). The provost also reports the suspension of admissions or discontinuation to UW System Administration in keeping with relevant policy requirements (per UWSA policy on suspending and discontinuing programs (SYS 102)).

### Proposal Guidelines

Although there are various circumstances that may culminate in a decision to suspend admissions or discontinue a degree/major program, there are common issues that should be addressed in proposals. Expectations are stated below. Program faculty and staff who seek to suspend or discontinue programs, especially those with robust student enrollments, should

explore the issues in depth, and should confer with their deans and other constituencies and advisors as their discussions proceed.

Each proposal should include:

1. An explanation of the precipitating circumstances or rationale for the proposal. Such explanations may be based in the unit's mission/focus and consequent realignment of resources with those changes; substantial changes/redirection of fields/courses of study; declining faculty and student interest in the field of study; negative assessment of program quality and concern about the ability to deliver programming of acceptable quality to students; budgetary considerations; or other forces. The explanation need not be lengthy, but should provide sufficient detail so that shared governance groups can understand the situation.
2. The potential impact on students currently enrolled. This should include, but may not be limited to students currently enrolled in the program, or who may be reasonably expected to be "in the pipeline" through advising or indication of interest at time of admission. Is there a market demand for students with this education that will not be met in the absence of the program? Are there other UW-Madison programs that provide a related educational experience?
3. The potential impact on faculty and academic staff. In particular, there should be planning for any staffing changes as a consequence of a discontinuation.
4. An explanation and evidence of efforts made to confer with and to notify stakeholders affected by this change. This should include, but may not be limited to: faculty and staff who contribute to the program; academic units that provide resources (courses, advisement, faculty, budget) to support the program; students currently enrolled in the program, or who may be reasonably expected to be "in the pipeline" through advising or indication of interest at time of admission; alumni; and any other significant stakeholders (e.g., Boards of Visitors, community interest groups, chair of the Associated Students of Madison, etc.) The appropriate efforts will be extensive for programs with robust student enrollments and may be minimal for programs that are chronically low-enrollment or no-enrollment.
5. An overview of the "teach-out plan" that explains how students will be supported through to completion of their degree. Enough detail should be provided to assure those reviewing the proposal that a plan to support students is in place, although the exact details may evolve as implementation proceeds. The plan should consider the needs of currently enrolled, prospective, and stopped-out students. (A stopped-out student is one who was a previously enrolled degree-seeking student who suspended enrollment for one or more fall and/or spring term and who subsequently seeks to re-enroll.) A key feature of the teach-out plan is that it conveys how program quality will

be maintained and ensured through the teach-out period for enrolled, prospective and stopped-out students.

- a. Currently enrolled students: Students who have declared an intention to complete the program must be supported with courses, advising, and other services to complete the program. The faculty should plan to continue teaching required courses or make reasonable exceptions to those requirements to facilitate student completion of the requirements. In some cases, the faculty may need to adjust program requirements to maintain quality throughout the teach-out period. Such a change in curricular requirements may require approval by the school/college curriculum committee.
  - b. Prospective students in the admissions “pipeline”: The expectations of any student who has formally signaled an interest in the program should be considered. This would include students who selected the program on the application for admission (this includes undergraduate new freshman or transfer students or graduate students), or have otherwise been in a formal advising flow preceding declaration of the program. Efforts must be made to inform these students that their program of interest is no longer available and to explain to them what other program options are available. Sufficient advance notification must be given for undergraduate programs to assure that prospective and current students are not making their college choice decisions based on a program that may become unavailable to them. See the section below about the Undergraduate Admissions Timeline. There are similar timeline considerations for graduate programs.
  - c. Stopped-out students (those who were formerly enrolled in the program but who are re-entering after the program has been suspended or discontinued): Standard University policy is that students are readmitted to the program (in SIS parlance, the plan and academic group) they were enrolled in before they stopped-out. However, students will NOT be re-admitted to a degree/major that has been suspended or discontinued. The teach-out plan must describe how stopped-out students will be supported to find an appropriate new major/degree program. Typically, they are advised by the school/college student services associate dean, or Cross-College Advising Services for undergraduates, or the Graduate School for graduate students. Those planning to suspend or discontinue an undergraduate program should consult with the Director of Undergraduate Advising to assist in planning advising considerations. See the section below that elaborates on issues that need to be considered and addressed in the teach-out plan.
6. For proposals to suspend admissions, admissions may be suspended for up to three years, although the dean or provost may set a shorter deadline to receive a plan to reopen or discontinue the degree/major. Proposals to suspend admissions must include a timeline for submitting a report and proposal to the Office of the Provost on

the final status of the program. (The Office of the Provost/director of Academic Planning will track and follow up on these actions.)

7. Timeline and advance communication plan. Decisions to suspend admissions or discontinue a program should be made using a transparent and open process. They must be initiated far enough in advance so that prospective students are not making decisions about where to go to college or graduate school based on programs that will become unavailable to them. Generally, approved proposals to suspend admissions or discontinue active programs will go into effect at least one full admissions cycle after approval. For example, a proposal that is approved at the school/college level and submitted to the Provost's Office in time for consideration and action at the February GFEC or UAPC can usually go into effect for the next admitting cycle that begins the following Fall for enrollment a year later. (Specifically, a proposal approved by February 2020, can allow for a degree/major to be removed from materials for the admissions cycle that begins in Fall 2020 for Fall 2021 enrollment.) In some circumstances, even more lead time may be required. See the outline of the Undergraduate Admissions timeline below. Some extraordinary circumstances may require more rapid action and those cases will be considered by the dean and provost on a case-by-case basis. Timelines for discontinuing inactive, low/no-award programs are typically fairly short.
8. Suspension/Discontinuation of Related Programs. The proposal to suspend or discontinue a degree/major must also specify any related academic components that are to be discontinued. For example, a pre-major code, certificate, PhD minor or Subject listing of the same name may also need to be discontinued and the proposal should explicitly request the change for those components.

### The Undergraduate Admissions Timeline

Advance planning is necessary to fully consider students who are in the pipeline and may be making college choices based on programs available at UW-Madison.

There are four milestones to keep in mind when planning the timeline for suspending admissions to an undergraduate degree/major: (1) about a year and a half prior to the Fall term of enrollment, the Office of Admissions and Recruiting begins distributing information to prospective students, including information about available majors. (2) about 15 months prior to the fall term of enrollment the Office of Admissions and Recruiting begins finalizing print publications for distribution during the admissions cycle September through May. (3) about 12 months prior to the Fall Term of enrollment applicants begin applying, including selecting intended majors, and begin confirming enrollment. (4) between 4 and 12 months prior to the Fall Term of enrollment new students are confirming their decision to enroll and are being assigned an academic plan for advising purposes. At this point of commitment, a student may have made a decision to attend UW-Madison based on a program advertised as available to new students. The student's notification deadline is May 1 prior to the fall term of enrollment.

## Considerations Associated with the Teach-out Plan

The teach-out plan is required to assure that there is a plan in place to meet the commitment made to students who are in the program, or who are making decisions to enter UW-Madison based on the availability of the program, or students who were at one time in the program and have stopped-out. The plan will need to make the program available to students for a sufficiently long time to allow all of those in the pipeline to complete. Depending on circumstances, this can be a short or a long period of time. As the program winds down, planning must be in place for alternatives to current requirements if needed.

Under these policy guidelines, students who have stopped-out should not be automatically readmitted to the program they left when they seek to re-enroll. (Before 2012, the undergraduate readmission policy puts students back in the same program even if admissions has been suspended or discontinued.) Consequently, the teach-out plan must specify exact provisions for stopped-out students, as well as for enrolled and prospective students.

Note that confusion about what degree or major a stopped-out undergraduate should be re-admitted into is also a problem for programs that are re-organized or re-named as well as programs that are suspended or discontinued. A variety of program changes need to include specifications about how to transition stopped-out students.

Questions that the teach-out plan should answer include:

- Who is the primary contact for Admissions to consult with when a stopped-out student seeks re-entry? Who will provide dean's office and advising support for the students?
- If the students may be re-admitted to the suspended/discontinued major during the teach-out phase when courses are still available for enrolled students, for how many terms will this be allowed?
- Is there an alternative or closely related major or majors that are prepared to enroll students from the suspended/discontinued major? Have the faculty in those programs been included in planning?
- Transfer to an individual major (undergraduate) or special committee degree (graduate) is the preferred approach for students on the tail end of a discontinued program.

## Why are these guidelines necessary?

Suspending or discontinuing a degree/major program can have impacts that go beyond the immediate program faculty, staff, and the enrolled students. Careful planning, as outlined in this document, ensures wide communication and attention to these wider impacts, and ensures that program quality is maintained throughout the teach-out period. This policy also outlines ways that attention must be given to school/college considerations, System and Regent policy, federal regulations, and accreditation standards.